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LIMITED SERIES
1 of 6
THE LAST
DEFENDERS
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DIRECT EDITION
RATED T+
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S.H.I.E.L.D. ENCRYPTED DOSSIER: # A177CAF //
APPROVED BY STARK, A. 001-F3R //
LINK FILES: ADAM/EVE, CENTERVILLE, DUNN/HALE (MORE)
MISSION BRIEF: COVERT SEARCH AND RECON //
NEUTRALIZE ENEMY TECH. //
BLACK OP DESIGNATION: "PEANUT DUMPLING"
HELI-COMMAND DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE...!
THEY DON'T WANT TO KNOW--
THE TERM IS "EXPENDABLE"--
FIELD TEAM LEADER: PENNYSWORTH, JOAQUIN C. //
THIS DOSSIER WILL SELF-CORRUPT AT 0300 ZULU--
QUIET BACK THERE!
STEVENS! GET UP HERE WITH THAT SECURITY SCANNER--
SIR--?
I DOUBT THIS BUNKER'S A PARK RANGER STATION...
SCANNING...
...READING MULTIPLE SECURITY SIGNALS. INFRARED...LASER ARRAY...MOTION SENSORS...
ALRIGHT, THIS IS IT--
--EVERYONE HAVE THEIR WHISTLES HANDY. NEURAL IMMUNIZATION MAY ONLY GO SO FAR, ESPECIALLY THIS CLOSE TO THE SOURCE.
FIRST STEP, NEUTRALIZE THEIR SECURITY SO WE CAN--
BLAM BLAM BLAM
--DAMMIT--!

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WATCH IT! WATCH IT!
HUUNGGG--!
ALL UNITS--TAKE COVER--! WE'VE BEEN MADE!
SIR--
--THEY'RE COMIN' OUTTA THE TREES, SIR--!
AAARRHH--!
THOMPSON!
GRK--!
THE LEADER... HE'S STILL BREATHING.
HE'S THE ONLY ONE.
LET'S SEE WHAT THE SUPREME SERPENT WANTS TO DO WITH HIM...
HHHNNNN...

THREE WEEKS LATER
GRAND COULEE HYDROELECTRIC POWER STATION, WASHINGTON STATE.
KYLE RICHMOND HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE.
EVEN THIS LATE AT NIGHT.
DESTINY FALLS
THE ULTIMATE CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE DEFENDERS BEGINS HERE!
JOE CASEY CO-PLOT/SCRIPT
KEITH GIFFEN CO-PLOT/BREAKDOWNS
JIM MUNIZ PENCILS • CAM SMITH INKS
ANTONIO FABELA COLORS
RS & COMICRAFT'S ALBERT DESCHESNE LETTERS
McNIVEN, VINES, AND HOLLOWELL COVER
TOM BRENNAN ASST. EDITOR • STEPHEN WACKER EDITOR
JOE QUESADA CHIEF • DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

GIVE IT UP, GRIMES--!
HHNNNN...
...YOU THINK YOU GOT THE DROP ON US, BIRD-MAN. MAYBE YOU DID.
BUT WE GOT A JOB TO DO UP IN HERE--
--AN' I'M NOT LETTING SOME TWO-BIT CAPE STOP US FROM--
LOOK WHO'S TALKING, PERCY--
--YOU'RE FAR FROM A-LIST.
AND THE NAME'S NIGHTHAWK.
INITIATIVE INTEL RIGHT ON THE MONEY, AS USUAL.
AND IT SOUNDS LIKE GARGOYLE'S JUST TAKEN CARE OF BROTHER NUMBER TWO...

ISAAC. YOU OKAY UP HERE?
INDEED I AM. THESE BROTHERS GRIMM OFFERED LITTLE THREAT IN THE REALM OF CLOSE QUARTER COMBAT...
...AND WE SUCCEEDED IN PREVENTING THEM FROM DETONATING THE EXPLOSIVE DEVICES THEY PLANTED HERE.
00:00
SUPERHUMAN TERRORISM. NOT MUCH OF A MAGIC TRICK...
TIME TO CALL IN THE CLEAN UP CREW.
THEY'LL SHIP THESE BOZOS BACK TO THE RAFT.
A BIT LIKE THE OLD DAYS, EH, KYLE? BUT A FLEETING NOSTALGIA...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I WAS THINKING ABOUT MOVING BACK TO CHRISTIANSBORO. I'M AN OLD MAN... AND THIS IS A NEW WORLD.
BESIDES... I AM NOT FOND OF HENRY GYRICH.
FORGET GYRICH. I'VE GOT A MEETING WITH STARK...
...YOU AND I ARE BOTH ABOUT TO BE TRANSFERRED OUT OF CAMP HAMMOND PERMANENTLY.
I'M...NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND...
DO ME A FAVOR, GARGOYLE. DON'T HANG IT UP JUST YET.
I'VE GOT IT ALL WORKED OUT...

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER:
MOBILE AIRBORNE COMMAND CENTER
DESIGNATION: HERMES (CLASS LUXOR)
CURRENT ALTITUDE: 2.7 MILES ABOVE NEW YORK
TAXPAYER COST: NINE BILLION
"NICE WORK, KYLE. HOPEFULLY, ONCE WE GET THE GRIMES BROTHERS INTO SEPARATE INTERROGATION ROOMS, WE'LL GET SOME ADDITIONAL INSIGHT INTO THEIR SUDDEN PENCHANT FOR DEMOLITION.
"THE RANGERS INTERCEPTED A NEW GYPSY MOTH TRYING SOMETHING SIMILAR AT A GENETIC RESEARCH FACILITY OUTSIDE HOUSTON. COULD BE ANOTHER COORDINATED SERIES OF ATTACKS.
"BUT THAT'S A DIFFERENT CONVERSATION, OBVIOUSLY, YOU KNOW WHY I WANTED YOU UP HERE TO TALK TODAY."
YOUR PETITIONS TO ESTABLISH A NEW DEFENDERS TEAM AS PART OF THE FIFTY STATE INITIATIVE DID NOT GO UNREAD. I'VE JUST BEEN BUSY. YOU UNDERSTAND.
THE FACT IS, THE DEFENDERS WERE ALWAYS ON THE OVERALL AGENDA. BUT PROVIDING EACH STATE WITH ITS OWN FULLY-FUNCTIONAL SUPER HERO ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN A GRADUAL, ONGOING PROCESS. BUT NOW... YOUR TIME HAS COME.
ALTHOUGH, I'M NOT QUITE SURE WHY YOU FELT THE NEED FOR BUSINESS ATTIRE...
TONY...
...I REALIZE YOU MAY HAVE ONE OR TWO...ISSUES WHEN IT COMES TO ME. AFTER ALL, I KNOW I STARTED OUT SIDING WITH THE RESISTANCE...

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE.
WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO *ME* IS THAT YOU ULTIMATELY CAME TO YOUR SENSES.
SO...ARE YOU READY TO MEET THE TEAM YOU'LL BE LEADING?
YOU MEAN...YOU'VE ALREADY--?

LISTEN...I'VE SPOKEN TO ISAAC...PATSY... EVEN ERIC PAYNE. THEY'RE ALL MORE THAN WILLING TO--
KYLE, YOU'VE GOT TO ADMIT THAT ***PAST LINEUPS*** HAVE ***NEVER*** WORKED OUT FOR THE DEFENDERS; AT LEAST FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME...

THERE'S A ***FORMULA*** FOR ANY SUCCESSFUL SUPER-TEAM. AND WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING TEAM ROSTERS, I'M AN ***EXPERT.***
TRUST ME. THIS DECISION INVOLVED HOURS OF CAREFUL CONSIDERATION.

LET'S GO.
WAIT A SECOND, TONY.
YOU MAY BE IN CHARGE HERE, BUT I'VE GOT A ***HISTORY*** WITH THIS GROUP.
I THINK I KNOW WHO WORKS BEST WHEN IT COMES TO--

NO ONE'S DISCOUNTING THAT HISTORY. IT'S WHY YOU WERE PICKED TO LEAD.
BESIDES, I SERIOUSLY DOUBT YOU'RE GOING TO BE ***DISPLEASED*** WITH WHO WE'VE GOT ON BOARD.
THAT'S NOT EXACTLY THE POINT. IF I ***AM*** FRONTING THIS TEAM, SHOULDN'T I BE THE ONE WHO--

HOLD THAT THOUGHT, NIGHTHAWK...,
...AND SAY HELLO TO ***THE NEW JERSEY DEFENDERS.***
NEW JERSEY...?

YOUR PROXIMITY TO NEW YORK CITY--CERTAINLY A PROVEN PRIME TARGET FOR SUPERHUMAN AGGRESSORS--MEANS WE NEEDED A POWERHOUSE TEAM IN PLACE. AND SO...
I'M SURE YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH PIOTR RASPUTIN, CODENAMED: COLOSSUS. FORMERLY OF THE XAVIER INSTITUTE.
AND THIS IS MARK TODD, A.K.A. THE BLAZING SKULL. NEW INITIATIVE RECRUIT.
SURE, BUT I'VE BEEN AROUND. I USED TO BUST NAZI HEADS.
NOW HOLD UP A SECOND, STARK. I DON'T GET IT... THIS GUY DOESN'T HAVE A UNIFORM?! WHAT KIND OF SUPER HERO IS HE SUPPOSED TO BE?!
WAIT... ...IT'S JUST THE THREE OF US?!
THERE'S A FOURTH. UNFORTUNATELY, SHE'S GOING TO NEED A BIT MORE... CONVINCING.
BUT FROM THIS POINT ON, THAT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.
WHAT?!
GOOD LUCK, KYLE.
RIGHT.
WHY DO I HAVE THE FEELING I'M GOING TO NEED A LOT MORE THAN LUCK HERE...?

OKAY...
LOOK, I KNOW THESE AREN'T EXACTLY *IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES*, BUT REST ASSURED, I'M *DETERMINED* TO MAKE THIS WORK.
AS FOR HOW I'M *DRESSED*...WELL, I WASN'T EXACTLY EXPECTING TO...
NEVER MIND.

SO...THE BLAZING SKULL---
THAT'S *"SKULL"*...NOT *"SKRULL."* JUST SO WE'RE CLEAR.
I DON'T THINK I WAS IMPLYING---
---WELL, THANKS FOR CLARIFYING.

RASPUTIN... YOU'RE FROM THE X-MEN--
THE X-MEN ARE NO MORE.
I HAVE BEEN... *ADVISED*...BY THOSE I TRUST--- THAT THIS WOULD BE A BENEFICIAL USE OF MY MUTANT ABILITIES.

I...CAN APPRECIATE THAT.
AND YOU HIT ON THE OPERATIVE WORD..."*TRUST*." IF WE'RE GOING TO FUNCTION AS A UNIT, THE MAIN THING WE SHOULD ENGENDER IS--
Y'KNOW...MAYBE YOU SHOULD RUN BACK TO THE LOCKER ROOM AND GRAB YOUR *MASK* IF YOU'RE GONNA BE MAKING SPEECHES...

PERHAPS WE SHOULD AWAIT THE *FOURTH* THAT IRON MAN SPOKE OF.
THE FOURTH...
YEAH. YOU MAKE A GOOD POINT THERE.

FOR GOD'S SAKE...BASED ON *THESE TWO*, I CAN'T IMAGINE WHO *ELSE* STARK IS GOING TO RAM DOWN MY THROAT...!
I'M ALMOST AFRAID TO *FIND OUT*...

SIX HOURS LATER
UNDERNEATH MANHATTAN.
JENNIFER WALTERS HAS NOTHING TO LOSE.
SHE-HULK--
--WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING DOWN HERE?!
WHAT THE HELL DOES IT LOOK LIKE I'M DOING, RICHMOND?!
THE SCORCHER HERE SKIPPED OUT ON BAIL. HARD TO BELIEVE, HUH?
NOW...I KNOW EXACTLY WHO YOU'VE BEEN HANGING OUT WITH, SO IF YOU'RE HERE TO TRY AND ROPE ME INTO ONE OF S.H.I.E.L.D.'S POLICE STATE ACTIONS, YOU CAN FORGET IT!
COME ON... YOU USED TO BE A TEAM PLAYER. THE AVENGERS. THE FANTASTIC FOUR. THE AVENGERS AGAIN--
AND NOW THE DEFENDERS, HUH? SHOULDN'T YOU BE OUT RECRUITING MY COUSIN?
BE REALISTIC. THAT SHIP HAS SAILED. BESIDES, YOU'RE A MUCH BETTER FIT FOR WHAT WE'RE--
ENOUGH WITH THE SALES PITCH, ALRIGHT? I NEED TO GET THIS GUY IN AND COLLECT MY PERCENTAGE FEE.
LISTEN...IS THIS ABOUT TONY STARK?
WHAT DID YOU SAY?!
I MEAN... I KNOW THERE'S SOME HISTORY THERE...
...SOME... BAD BLOOD...

...THE WHOLE... LAWSUIT THING...
...AND, OF COURSE I HEARD THAT YOU TWO... W-WELL...
...I-I MEAN...
HUUHNNDT--!
OKAY, NOTE TO SELF: BIT OF A SHORT FUSE ON THIS ONE.
TIME FOR A DIFFERENT TACK--
HOLD ON!
I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING--
--WHAT ARE THE ODDS THAT STARK PICKED YOU AS OUR FOURTH BECAUSE HE KNEW YOU WOULDN'T DO IT?!
TRUST ME. I GET THE SENSE HE'S NOT TOO THRILLED WITH ME RUNNING A TEAM IN THE FIRST PLACE--
--HE'S LOOKING FOR A REASON TO PULL THE PLUG! I'M SURE OF IT. AND YOU'RE THE SCAPEGOAT...!
HUH.
THAT DOES SOUND LIKE THE KIND OF MACHIAVELLIAN MOVE HE'S GOTTEN SO GOOD AT LATELY.
RIGHT. HE THINKS HE'S GOT YOU PEGGED. C'MON, LET'S BOTH PROVE HIM WRONG--
WOW.
YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO SHOVEL IT, RICHMOND. YOU AND TONY ARE TWO PEAS IN A POD.
BUT KEEP TALKING.

MANY YEARS AGO
THE HIMALAYAS.
A LOST SOUL SEEKS AFFIRMATION.
AFTER MUCH MEDITATION...MUCH CONSIDERATION... I HAVE SURMISED THE FOLLOWING...
...THERE IS NOTHING I CAN TEACH YOU HERE.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. MY SEARCH FOR SELF HAS LED ME RIGHT TO YOU, ANCIENT ONE.
HAVE I NOT THE UNIQUE CAPABILITIES REQUIRED TO TAKE ON THE MANTLE OF--
TRUE, YOU ARE INDEED GIFTED. TOUCHED BY ALL THINGS BEYOND THE WORLD OF MAN. YOUR CONNECTION TO THE OCCULT IS STRONGER THAN ANY WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY WALKED THIS EARTH.
BUT THERE IS ANOTHER. A WESTERNER... AN AMERICAN...
PERHAPS I AM TEMPTING DESTINY, BUT THE WAR FOR HIS SOUL IS ONE I AM FINALLY READY TO WAGE...ONE THAT I MUST WIN.
FOR BETTER OR WORSE, SOMEDAY HE WILL WEAR THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO. BUT THIS IS ALL ACADEMIC.
TO [redacted] THE NEXT SORCERER SUPREME... IT [redacted] WITHIN YOU, BUT IT IS ALSO BENEATH YOU.
TAKE HEART, YOU ARE STILL SO VERY YOUNG. THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK WILL BE FOUND...BUT ULTIMATELY, THEY WILL BE FOUND ELSEWHERE...
...SON OF SATAN.
THAT WAS THEN.

NOW
HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY.
DEFENDERS H.Q.
"IN CASE ANY OF YOU WERE CURIOUS... DATA SYSTEMS SHOULD BE ONLINE AND FULLY OPERATIONAL BY WEEK'S END..."
...WE'LL BE PLUGGED INTO A NETWORK THAT INCLUDES S.H.I.E.L.D.-ENCRYPTED FILES AS WELL AS THE CENTRAL COMPUTER SYSTEMS OF EVERY OTHER INITIATIVE TEAM ACROSS THE COUNTRY. ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY. YOU'LL ALL BE ISSUED INDIVIDUAL PASS CODES ALONG WITH FULL INITIATIVE SECURITY CLEARANCE...
THERE'S A COMBAT SIMULATOR LOCATED NEXT DOOR. IF WE HAD TIME, I'D SET UP A SESSION SO WE COULD GET A BETTER SENSE OF EACH OTHER'S TECHNIQUES IN THE FIELD.
UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE ON A BIT OF AN ACCELERATED SCHEDULE HERE...
THIS WHOLE INITIATIVE THING... IT'S GETTING KINDA OLD, ISN'T IT...?
AND LISTEN... IF I HEAR THE WORDS, "MONITOR DUTY," I'M GONNA WALK.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN... WE COULD BE SEEING SOME ACTION SOON. VERY SOON.
SCATTERED INTEL REPORTS ARE TELLING US THAT THE SONS OF THE SERPENT ARE MAKING NOISE AGAIN AND THAT THERE'S AN ACTIVE CELL OF AGENTS RIGHT HERE IN JERSEY--
OKAY. I LEFT MY HANDBOOK BACK IN CLEVELAND...
...WHAT ARE THE "SONS OF THE SERPENT"?
AN EXTREMELY XENOPHOBIC HATE GROUP. FAIRLY UNDERGROUND. THEY'RE BASICALLY THE KLAN IN SNAKE OUTFITS.

THAT'S ACTUALLY... A FAIRLY APT DESCRIPTION. I'VE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE WITH THESE MANIACS.
IN ANY CASE, OUR INTEL PROVIDES A SPECIFIC--
I HAVE HEARD OF THIS SERPENT GROUP. NO DOUBT THEIR ELITISM APPLIES TO MUTANTS AS WELL--

HEY! RUSSKIE!
WE DIDN'T GET DRAFTED INTO THIS OUTFIT SO WE COULD DEBATE SOCIOPOLITICAL TOPICS! SO JUST--
I FIND MYSELF AMUSED BY YOUR USE OF THE WORD, "SOCIOPOLITICAL."

ARE YOU CALLIN' ME OUT, CHROME DOME?!
BACK OFF, SKULL!
WE'RE NOT GOING TO START BICKERING LIKE CHILDREN! WE'VE GOT A LOCATION--
IZVINITE... IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

DEEP BREATH, KYLE...
THERE'S A LOT MORE TO THIS. OUR MANDATE IS NOT SIMPLY TO BUST THESE GUYS...
...S.H.I.E.L.D. SENT A COVERT INTERCEPTOR TEAM TO TRY AND FERRET THEM OUT. THOSE AGENTS HAVE BEEN MISSING FOR CLOSE TO A MONTH NOW. SO OBVIOUSLY--

THIS ALREADY FEELS A LITTLE LIKE AMATEUR HOUR, RICHMOND.
S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENTS HAVE LOCATOR TECH BUILT INTO THEIR UNIFORMS--
THE LOCATOR TECH ISN'T RESPONDING TO THE HOMING SIGNAL--
INCOMING: S.H.I.E.L.D. DOSSIER FILES///// CODING ENCRYPTION///// DOWNLOADING--

OKAY. HERE WE GO...
--MISSION BRIEF: "PEANUT DUMPLING"///// FIELD TEAM LEADER: PENNYSWORTH, JOAQUIN C.///// AGENT RANK:
...UH...
JOAQUIN... PENNYSWORTH?!

THIS WAS A MISTAKE. THIS WAS A MISTAKE. THIS WAS A MISTAKE.
UMMM... HELLO?! EARTH TO FEARLESS LEADER!
YOU GONNA SPACE OUT ON US LIKE THIS EVERY TIME WE HAVE A MEETING?!
DAMMIT...! LAST I CHECKED, JOAQUIN WAS STILL TRAINING ON THE FARM! AND NOW...
DID STARK KNOW ABOUT THIS? THAT I--
RICHMOND! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?!
AHHH... NOTHING. SORRY ABOUT THAT. I'M HERE.
THE INTEL I WAS GIVEN INDICATES SOMETHING SERPENT-RELATED GOING DOWN--
--SOMEWHERE WITHIN ATLANTIC CITY LIMITS.
ATLANTIC CITY?! YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!
LET'S NOT LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH, SHE-HULK. IF WE CAN GET OUR HANDS ON ONE OF THESE CREEPS...
...WE CAN SQUEEZE THEM FOR INFO ON THE MISSING S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENTS. FINDING THEM IS OUR PRIME OBJECTIVE.
ALIVE OR DEAD...?
...I REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT--
BUT SURELY... IF THE LOCATOR TECH IS NOT RESPONDING, THAT WOULD SUGGEST THEY COULD ALREADY BE--
FOR GOD'S SAKE, LET'S CROSS THAT BRIDGE IF AND WHEN WE COME TO IT, OKAY?!
WOW. TOUCHY...
MY APOLOGIES, TOVARISCH. I DID NOT MEAN TO IMPLY THAT--
LOOK, FORGET ABOUT IT. LET'S JUST GET TO WORK. THERE'S A TRANSPORT WARMING UP OUT ON THE TARMAC...

MEANWHILE
TRANSIA. WUNDAGORE MOUNTAIN.
A FORGOTTEN WARLORD HAS MADE A FATEFUL CHOICE.
IF THE GREAT CREATOR WERE PRESENT, I DOUBT HE WOULD CONDONE THIS EXPERIMENT...
...HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT OUR WORK HAS CONTINUED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY IS NOT COMPLETELY OPPOSED TO OUR GOAL.
EVEN THE KNIGHTS WHO GUARD THIS CITADEL HAVE NOT--
SPARE ME YOUR IRRELEVANT MUSINGS. YOU AND YOUR TEAM ARE BEING WELL PAID. SO... PROCEED.
A WORD OF WARNING, THEN...
...TO SUCCESSFULLY MUTATE YOUR ATLANTEAN PHYSIOLOGY INVOLVES A SERIES OF EXTREMELY INVASIVE PROCEDURES.
THERE WILL BE... CONSIDERABLE PAIN...
ENOUGH! YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS. DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO MAKE ME MORE LIKE...
...HIM.
VERY WELL.
INITIATING MOLECULAR GENETIC SPLICE--
--NOW.
YEGARRGG--!
INDEED, THERE IS PAIN... PAIN UNLIKE ANY KRANG HAS EVER KNOWN.
IT FEELS GOOD TO HIM. IT FEELS RIGHT.

TRUMP PLAZA; IMPERIAL BALLROOM.
THE SONS OF THE SERPENT ARE GETTING THEIR MYSTIC CEREMONY ON.
KAA NAAMA KA LAJERAAMA...
KAA NAAMA KA LAJERAAMA...
KAA NAAMA KA LAJERAAMA...
KAA NAAMA KA LAJERAAMA...
THIS IS... AN ODD SITUATION...
I TOLD YOU... THE NEW SUPREME SERPENT APPRECIATES SELF-STARTERS.
ORGANIC WEAPONRY IS A WHOLE NEW FIELD. THIS IS JUST BETA TESTING. IF IT WORKS...NEXT STOP, MEXICO. THE FIRST STEP IN FIXING THE IMMIGRATION NIGHTMARE. NOW, KEEP QUIET--!
WAIT--
--WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!
DEFENDERS DEFENESTRATE!
OKAY, KYLE-- THIS IS IT.
TRIAL BY FIRE.

WHAT IS THIS ALTAR THEY HAVE CONSTRUCTED...?!
WHO CARES?! ENEMY TARGETS IN SIGHT--
--AND I'M OFF MY MEDS!
CAREFUL ON THE ATTACK, PEOPLE! THIS BALLROOM MAY BE EMPTY, BUT WE'RE PROBABLY RIGHT NEXT DOOR TO--
OH MY GOD--
--THE CASINO!
WE'VE GOT CIVILIANS IN THE LINE OF FIRE NOW!
WE NEED TO END THIS QUICK!
NO HARM SHALL COME TO THESE INNOCENTS--!
WATCH THE RICOCHETS, COLOSSUS!

FIRST, I'M GONNA BUST UP THIS DOMESTIC TERROR RING--
--THEN I'M BETTIN' EVERYTHING ON RED!

BOZHE MOI! I CAN FEEL YOUR HEAT FROM HERE, SKULL! DO NOT FORGET I AM AN ALLY--!
QUIT MOANIN'! I'LL SLIP YOU SOME TURTLE WAX AFTERWARDS...!

DAMMIT...IT'S COMPLETE CHAOS IN HERE! WE NEED TO INITIATE SOME TEAMWORK BEFORE THIS WHOLE THING ESCALATES BEYOND OUR CONTROL--!
SHE-HULK! A LITTLE PROPULSION ASSIST--
BRING IT IN LOW, FEARLESS LEADER--
--AND I'LL DO THE REST!

NOT BAD.
GAMMA POWER AND BRAINS. NOT USED TO THAT COMBO...

FORGET MEXICO! ALL AGENTS--SCRAMBLE--!
THE SERPENTS ARE ATTEMPTING A HASTY RETREAT--!
DON'T LET THEM GET AWAY, COLOSSUS!
YOU! DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!
NK--!
I'M ONLY ASKING THIS ONCE, SNAKE-BOY--
--THE MISSING S.H.I.E.L.D. TEAM! WHERE ARE THEY?!
THE MISSING... WHAT?! I-I GOT NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE--
WRONG ANSWER!
WHOA... HOLD UP THERE, COWBOY!
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE GOOD GUYS, REMEMBER?
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, SHE-HULK! HE'S GOT--
JUST TAKE A BREATH...
..LET ME TRY A LITTLE CROSS-EXAMINATION HERE.
YOU REALLY WANT TO GET ME ANGRY, PAL? WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
W-WE NEED TO... TEND TO THE ALTAR. WE...CANNOT CONTROL QUETZALCOATL UNLESS WE--

"TEND TO THE ALTAR"...? WHAT DOES THAT--
SKRASH
THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN' ABOUT!
UH-OH.

STRIKE ONE SNAKE ALTAR! TELL THE DONALD HE NEEDS TO COMP US THE HIGH ROLLERS' SUITE!
WHAT'S A "QUETZALCOATL"...?

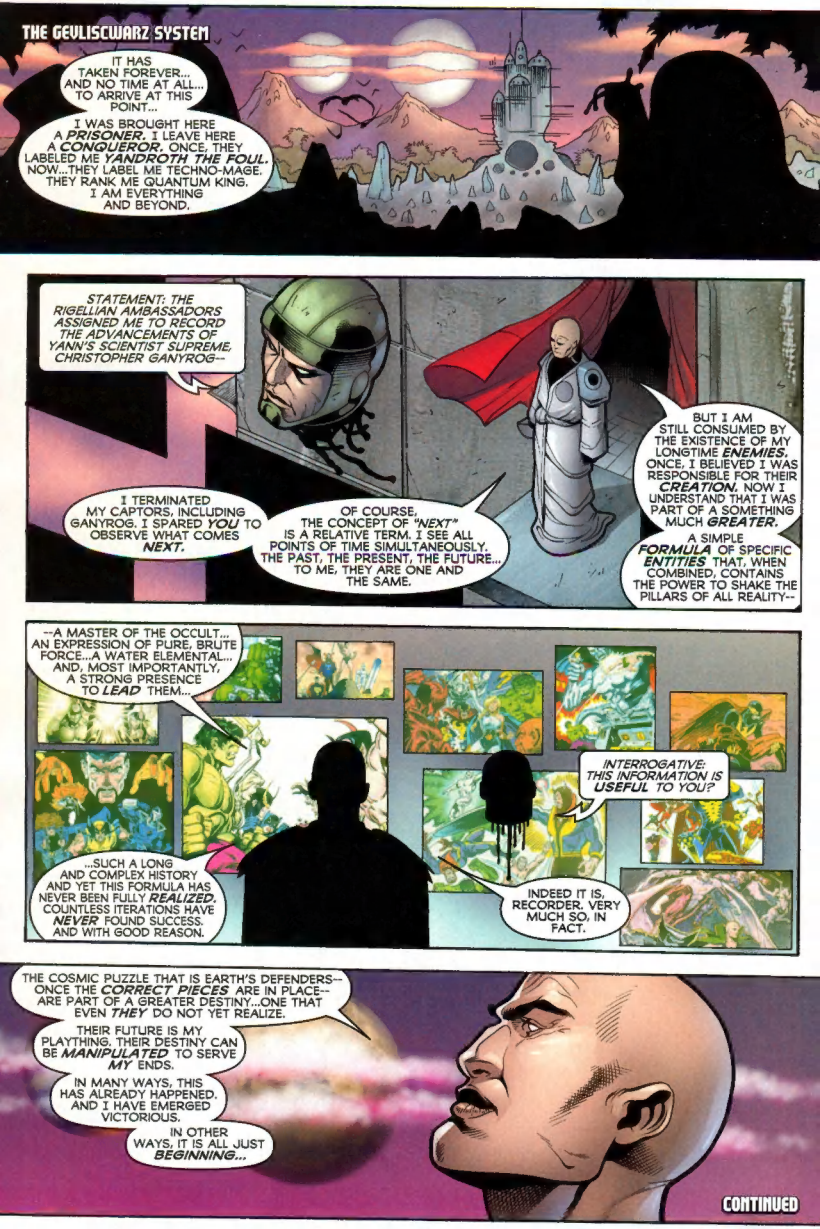
I THINK...
...WE ARE ABOUT TO FIND OUT--

NGG--!
WATCH IT--!

GET CLEAR! GET CLEAR!

OKAY! I ADMIT IT! I'M NOT UP ON MY MAGIC SPELL MOJO...!
I'M GONNA GET BLAMED FOR THIS, AREN'T I...?
WE CAN PLAY THE BLAME GAME LATER, SKULL.
BUT TO ANSWER YOUR EARLIER QUESTION--

--THAT'S A QUETZALCOATL.
OKAY, I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY OUR IMMEDIATE MISSION PARAMETERS HAVE CHANGED.
YEAH, MAYBE JUST A LITTLE...


THE GEVLISCWARZ SYSTEM
IT HAS TAKEN FOREVER... AND NO TIME AT ALL... TO ARRIVE AT THIS POINT...
I WAS BROUGHT HERE A PRISONER. I LEAVE HERE A CONQUEROR. ONCE, THEY LABELED ME YANDROTH THE FOUL. NOW...THEY LABEL ME TECHNO-MAGE. THEY RANK ME QUANTUM KING. I AM EVERYTHING AND BEYOND.
STATEMENT: THE RIGELLIAN AMBASSADORS ASSIGNED ME TO RECORD THE ADVANCEMENTS OF YANN'S SCIENTIST SUPREME, CHRISTOPHER GANYROG--
I TERMINATED MY CAPTORS, INCLUDING GANYROG. I SPARED YOU TO OBSERVE WHAT COMES NEXT.
OF COURSE, THE CONCEPT OF "NEXT" IS A RELATIVE TERM. I SEE ALL POINTS OF TIME SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE PAST, THE PRESENT, THE FUTURE... TO ME, THEY ARE ONE AND THE SAME.
BUT I AM STILL CONSUMED BY THE EXISTENCE OF MY LONGTIME ENEMIES. ONCE, I BELIEVED I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CREATION. NOW I UNDERSTAND THAT I WAS PART OF A SOMETHING MUCH GREATER.
A SIMPLE FORMULA OF SPECIFIC ENTITIES THAT, WHEN COMBINED, CONTAINS THE POWER TO SHAKE THE PILLARS OF ALL REALITY--
--A MASTER OF THE OCCULT... AN EXPRESSION OF PURE, BRUTE FORCE...A WATER ELEMENTAL... AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, A STRONG PRESENCE TO LEAD THEM...
...SUCH A LONG AND COMPLEX HISTORY AND YET THIS FORMULA HAS NEVER BEEN FULLY REALIZED. COUNTLESS ITERATIONS HAVE NEVER FOUND SUCCESS. AND WITH GOOD REASON.
INTERROGATIVE: THIS INFORMATION IS USEFUL TO YOU?
INDEED IT IS, RECORDER. VERY MUCH SO, IN FACT.
THE COSMIC PUZZLE THAT IS EARTH'S DEFENDERS-- ONCE THE CORRECT PIECES ARE IN PLACE-- ARE PART OF A GREATER DESTINY...ONE THAT EVEN THEY DO NOT YET REALIZE.
THEIR FUTURE IS MY PLAYTHING. THEIR DESTINY CAN BE MANIPULATED TO SERVE MY ENDS.
IN MANY WAYS, THIS HAS ALREADY HAPPENED. AND I HAVE EMERGED VICTORIOUS.
IN OTHER WAYS, IT IS ALL JUST BEGINNING...
CONTINUED

Team DCP